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# Forest Service says fire shows need for Crystal Clear Restoration, major timber-cutting plan at Mt. Hood

 Brittany Allen  Tuesday, September 12, 2017

**Bark environmental group says plan for 'fuels reduction' is off-base, given that older trees are most resistant to fire**



COURTESY OF BARK - Trees in the area slated to be cut during the Crystal Clear Restoration project at Mt. Hood National Forest.

(<https://pamplinmedia.com/images/artimg/00003588048258.jpg>) Just weeks after the U.S. Forest Service released its preliminary assessment regarding the Crystal Clear Restoration project — a major timber-cutting plan in the Mt. Hood National Forest — 300 acres of the planning area has been engulfed by fire.

Roughly 72 people have been deployed to combat the flames, dubbed the Rim Fire. The fire currently covers about 20 percent of the 12,725-acre planning area. (The acreage has decreased since the last public comment period from 13,271 acres.)

"There's still an obvious need for fuel reduction," said Forest Service project leader Casey Gatz, based on current events. The Rim Fire has only reinforced his purpose for seeing this project through.

The assessment outlines the management direction and proposed action of the project as well as shows how the project overlaps and complies with the land use allocations of the area.

Before the assessment was created, the Forest Service went through a rigorous scoping period, accepted public comment and consulted scientists about what the effects of the project could be on the area's vegetation, wildlife, recreational offerings, and many other aspects.

Though the preliminary assessment has been sent out for its 30-day public comment period, Gatz added that the plans for the sale "could change quite a bit."

Starting on Aug. 25, Bark, an environmental group dedicated to Mt. Hood National Forest-related issues, set up camp in the planning area. Bark's campout aimed to retrieve information about the area of the forest, which would be affected by the project, and the group plans to submit this data to the Forest Service during its public comment time.

Brenna Bell, attorney for Bark, said 150 people from the community and the environmental group came out to be boots on the ground and aid in the effort. The group even remained at its camp after receiving word of the Rim Fire about six miles away, but Bell explained that Bark staff was "in frequent communication with the Forest Service to ensure people were safe."

Once the fire erupted, the group focused on other areas and narrowly covered all the ground needed for its study.

"Another thing we found time and time again is there's very limited information in the assessment they sent out," she added. "There's all this diversity in the areas that is simply not reflected in the environmental assessment. They kind of paint this very large area with a very broad brush. It only highlighted the importance of being up there."

What volunteers found, Bell said, was very "contradictory" to what is explained in the U.S. Forest Service's assessment. In light of the Rim Fire, Bell took a different stance than project leader Gatz, and made a case that older, more mature forest should not be logged because it is more resistant to fire.

"They're positioning this as a fuels reduction project," she explained. "Mature forest is the most resilient."

Bell encourages members of the community to still take some time to explore the area of the project, even though the campout is over.

"It's been more than 10 years since we've seen a logging project like this," she explained. "It's a big change from the direction the agency was taking. I know people will care about that change and want to let the Forest Service know their opinion. This is our national forest and everybody has a voice."

As of Thursday, Sept. 7, the forest service has banned campfires, spark-emitting machinery, such as tractors, skidders, chainsaws and generators, target shooting, and smoking outside of vehicles in the Mt. Hood National Forest. Visitors may still use portable cooking stoves, but only those which require pressurized, liquid gas and turn off with a switch.

These restrictions apply to all campgrounds and wilderness areas within the forest.

For more information about this order, visit [www.fs.usda.gov/detail/mthood/notices/?cid=FSBDEV3\\_036636](http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/mthood/notices/?cid=FSBDEV3_036636) ([http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/mthood/notices/?cid=FSBDEV3\\_036636](http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/mthood/notices/?cid=FSBDEV3_036636)). To learn more about the Crystal Clear Restoration Project, visit [bark-out.org/project/crystal-clear-timber-sale](http://bark-out.org/project/crystal-clear-timber-sale) (<http://bark-out.org/project/crystal-clear-timber-sale>) or [www.fs.usda.gov/projects/mthood/landmanagement/projects](http://www.fs.usda.gov/projects/mthood/landmanagement/projects) (<http://www.fs.usda.gov/projects/mthood/landmanagement/projects>).

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